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Trade Advisory Groups Report on Singapore and Chile FTAs

WASHINGTON - The Office of the United States Trade Representative today received reports from 31 trade advisory committees, comprising over 700 practitioners representing diverse interests and views, regarding the recently completed free trade agreements (FTAs) with Singapore and Chile. The Trade Act of 2002 requires these committees to prepare reports on proposed trade agreements subject to Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) for the Administration and the Congress. By an overwhelming margin, the committees found that the agreements promote U.S. economic interests and substantially achieve the negotiating objectives set out by Congress in TPA legislation it enacted last year.

“The trade advisory committee reports on the Chile and Singapore FTAs demonstrate the broad support for these excellent agreements that will open markets for Americans farmers, workers, businesses and consumers,” U.S. Trade Representative Robert B. Zoellick said. “The reports recognize that these agreements will expand business opportunities for our products and services in both countries, helping to spur economic growth and create better jobs.”

“The trade advisory committee system is a valuable part of our effort to consult with and receive guidance from American trade stakeholders. It complements our close consultations with Congress. We very much rely on our advisors, and draw on their expertise and judgment in developing our negotiating positions,” added Zoellick.

Support for the agreements spanned virtually all of the groups, including the President’s Advisory Committee for Trade Policy and Negotiations, which “fully endorsed” both agreements: “We believe the agreement[s] strongly promote the economic interests of the United States and substantially achieve the overall and principal negotiating objectives set forth in the Trade Act of 2002.”

The reports will be transmitted to the President and the Congress today, and made public on the USTR website shortly. Excerpts from the reports will also be made available on the USTR website. The reports were prepared within the guidelines of TPA.

Background:

The trade negotiation advisory committee system was established in the Trade Act of 1974. The

purpose of the advisory system is to ensure that the Administration receives advice and assistance from a broad range of stakeholders in setting U.S. trade policy and developing U.S. positions in trade negotiations. The advisory program is run jointly by five federal agencies: USTR, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Labor, and the Environmental Protection Agency. USTR is the lead agency.

The advisory groups are made up of more than 700 cleared advisors from business, labor, environmental groups, consumer groups, state governments, as well as academic experts and retired U.S. government officials.

There are 31 chartered advisory committees, which meet with U.S. trade officials to provide advice on proposed and on-going trade initiatives. In FY02, more than 125 advisory committee meetings were held.

In addition, USTR and other agencies keep advisors informed by e-mail, the Internet, and fax of important developments in trade negotiations. More than 150 such communications were sent to advisors in FY02, an average of three per week.

More than 60 negotiating texts are currently available for advisor review in the reading rooms at USTR and the Department of Commerce. The texts of the Chile and Singapore FTAs were made available to advisors in early January via a new secure section of the USTR website, in order to better facilitate access. This was one of a number of improvements made to the trade advisory system in response to the recommendations of a General Accounting Office (GAO) report commissioned by Sen. Charles Grassley (R-IA), Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee.

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